

# Volunteers in the Courts News

Summer 2005

## Grant helps launch new CASA program

With a \$40,000 grant from the National CASA Association, Rock County recently launched a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program thanks to the efforts of Lisa Anderson, director of the Rock County CASA, and John Pfleiderer, executive director of Family Services of Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois, Inc.

Anderson learned of CASA four years ago and decided it was a program that Rock County needed to have. Working for Family Services' Sexual Assault Recovery Program and serving as a foster parent gave her a clear picture of the needs of abused children and she knew more needed to be done for them.

Pfleiderer worked for a CASA program in southern Indiana and knew Rock County would benefit from a similar program. He and Anderson turned to Judge Richard T. Werner, who has served on the bench in Rock County for nine years and who currently presides in the county's Juvenile Court. Werner, who has taken an active interest in child-welfare issues in the past, agreed that a CASA program would be beneficial and offered his full support. Also involved from the start was Chief Judge Michael N. Nowakowski, who, Pfleiderer said, has been "a critical part of this process."

Rock County CASA anticipates assigning its first volunteers to children in November. Each volunteer will be assigned one case at a time and must commit to a minimum of a year with that child. The volunteers must complete 40 hours of training and attend half a day of juvenile court. To accommodate the volunteers' schedules, training sessions will be held on Saturdays beginning in September.

CASA volunteers help judges understand more about the abused and neglected children who come to their court. By gathering sufficient information and preparing reports on each child, volunteers open doors for these children to receive the help they need. "The role of the CASA volunteer is to augment the judge's information base for making life-defining decisions for children," Pfleiderer said.

Funding is slow to come. The \$40,000 grant covers only 65 percent of the program's expected costs. Funds have also come from United Way of Northern Rock County and various foundations. Anderson and Pfleiderer recently completed their first fundraising event – a motorcycle poker run – as they continue to seek more volunteers.

"Sometimes it seems slow to get going," Pfleiderer said, "but the benefits the children will receive make it worthwhile."

*For more information contact Anderson at (608) 305-0187 or Pfleiderer at (608) 365-1244. For more information on starting a CASA program, contact Marsha Varvil-Weld, executive director, Wisconsin CASA Association, at (608) 742-5344 or [mlweld@wisconsincasa.org](mailto:mlweld@wisconsincasa.org).*

Sidebar:

### **Wisconsin CASA programs**

Wisconsin has six other CASA programs:

**CASA of Brown County** launched in June 2004 with grant money from the National CASA Association. This CASA currently has 13 volunteers. It receives additional funding from the Brett Favre Foundation, various community organizations, and the State of Wisconsin.

**Columbia-Sauk CASA** serving Columbia and Sauk counties since 1999. This CASA currently has 15 volunteers serving 17 children. It receives funding from a National CASA Association emergency grant, the State of Wisconsin, United Way, various community organizations, and Columbia County Human Services.

**Dane County CASA** established in 1995. Dane was the first county in Wisconsin to launch a CASA; this program currently has 50 volunteers serving 58 children. Funding comes from the Dane County Clerk of Courts Office, United Way, community organizations, and the State of Wisconsin.

**Voices for Children CASA Program** (Kenosha County) operating under the Alcohol & Other Drug Council of Kenosha. This program began in 1998 and currently has 14 volunteers working with 29 children. Its funding comes from the State of Wisconsin, in-kind contributions, fundraising events, and United Way.

**YWCA of the Coulee Region – CASA Program** (La Crosse County) serving the La Crosse area since 2001. This program currently serves 30 children with 20 volunteers and receives funding from the State of Wisconsin, United Way, private grants, various community organizations, and fundraising events.

**Milwaukee CASA** launched in 2001. This CASA has 45 volunteers serving 84 children. It receives funding from the National CASA Association, the State of Wisconsin, Junior League of Milwaukee, and various foundations and community organizations.

*Note: Fond du Lac County runs a child-advocacy program similar to CASA through its Conflict Resolution Center.*